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SUBJECT: UGANDA DELAYS IMPLEMENTATION OF NORTHERN RECOVERY PLAN

11. (SBU) Summary: The Government of Uganda (GOU) has announced a delay in the implementation of the Peace, Recovery, and Development Plan (PRDP), its framework for rehabilitation and recovery in war-ravaged northern Uganda. On December 22, 2008, Prime Minister Apollo Nsibambi informed donors in a letter that the implementation of the PRDP would begin in July 2009. Nsibambi reluctantly took this step after northern parliamentarians raised concerns about the capacity of the GOU to deliver promised projects and accountability within the current PRDP structure. Some northern politicians, who had privately requested the delay and commended Nsibambi for his honest appraisal of the PRDP's shortcomings, then publicly criticized the GOU for lacking the political will to assist long-marginalized northern populations. GOU officials are fully aware of the political ramifications of their decision, but believe that "getting it right" is more important than rushing forward and not being able to deliver critically-needed resources to the north. Practically speaking, the delay does not affect ongoing U.S. Government programs supporting the PRDP's priority sectors in health, education, agriculture, and infrastructure. End Summary.

12. (SBU) In December 2008, Prime Minister Nsibambi was scheduled to present the PRDP on the floor of Parliament just before Christmas recess. The Acholi and Northern Parliamentary Groups raised a series of fundamental questions about the PRDP, which caused Speaker of the House Edward Sekkandi to recommend a private meeting between northern parliamentarians and Nsibambi. David Wakikona, the Minister of State for Northern Uganda, told P/E Chief that he and the Prime Minister had met with Leader of the Opposition Morris Latigo and parliamentarian Reagan Okumu, both northerners. Wakikona said that Latigo and Okumu raised legitimate concerns about confusion between the national and local governments over PRDP responsibilities, about local governments lacking the capacity to effectively implement and oversee large-scale development projects, and about the Government not consulting with local governments in designing the PRDP. These complaints highlighted for the Prime Minister that the Government had failed to clearly communicate what the PRDP would deliver to the people of northern Uganda. (Note: The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) visited every district to work with local officials to design the PRDP over a one-year period. In order to address parliamentary criticism, the GOU conducted seminars for parliamentarians on the PRDP. USAID supported the PRDP seminars in November and December 2008. However, the GOU has failed to follow up with a public communications strategy on the PRDP. USAID's Office of Transition Initiatives is prepared to help in this effort once the GOU's message is crafted. End Note.)

13. (SBU) Wakikona said that the parliamentarians agreed that a delay in the implementation of the PRDP to allow the GOU to address these concerns was acceptable. Wakikona also reached out to other northern critics. Gulu District Chairman Norbert Mao told P/E Chief on January 2 that he had spoken to the Nsibambi, Wakikona, and PMO Permanent Secretary Pius Bigirimana. Mao, a key political player on both the local and national levels, said that he was satisfied that the Prime Minister was making a good faith effort to properly implement the PRDP. He has not publicly criticized the delay. Wakikona also spoke to Livingston Okello Okello, the Chairman of the

Acholi Parliamentary Group, who also endorsed the delay. Nonetheless, Okumu and Okello could not resist the opportunity after the announcement to publicly criticize the GOU for "suspending the PRDP" and lacking the commitment to assist the north.

14. (U) In response, the GOU issued a press statement on January 9 saying it had not suspended the PRDP and explained that the Ministry of Finance, line ministries, the districts, and the PMO had struggled with the challenge of disaggregating which funds were new resources, additional to normal budgetary allocations. In the statement, Minister for General Duties Adolf Mesigwe explained that between January and July, PRDP activities within the districts would be prioritized for full-scale implementation beginning in July 2009.

(Note: July 1 is the beginning of Uganda's budget year. End Note.) During this period, each ministry will submit its procurement plans to the PMO and plans for measurable indicators will be developed and made available to all stakeholders. The statement also outlined activities under the PRDP framework including road construction, resettlement programs, and provision of tractors to open up land, electrification projects, and ongoing donor programs. These included \$163 million in development assistance from the U.S. Government, \$100 million from the World Bank, and substantial contributions from Denmark, The Netherlands, and the European Union.

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WHAT WENT WRONG
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15. (SBU) The GOU's explanation, particularly the challenges of disaggregation, is an accurate assessment of the fundamental reason for the delay. Over the past year, U.S. Mission personnel, who

KAMPALA 00000113 002 OF 002

chair and participate in three donor groups dealing with the PRDP, witnessed the struggle between the Ministry of Finance, the line ministries, the district governments, and the PMO to clarify what funds were considered additional to yearly budget allocations, much of which would also go to PRDP priority sectors.

16. (SBU) What is not reported publicly is that the previous Permanent Secretary at the Prime Minister's Office, Martin Odwedu, was a key impediment to the implementation of the PRDP because he allowed personal corruption and cronyism to obstruct the creation of a workable bureaucratic structure for the PRDP. On January 15, Wakikona told P/E Chief that on at least three occasions in 2008 he had complained directly to President Museveni about Odwedu's corrupt activities. Museveni informed Wakikona that "the Odwedu problem would be resolved." Odwedu's contract was not renewed and he left government service in October 2008, paving the way for an extremely competent replacement, Pius Bigirimana, to take charge. Technical assistants at the PMO also expressed concerns about Odwedu's interference and foot-dragging during the PRDP process. Mission personnel who work with Bigirimana have thus far found him to be energetic and effective. His actions to date indicate that the implementation of the PRDP is his number one priority. Wakikona warned Prime Minister Nsibambi of Odwedu's efforts to undermine Bigirimana. Odwedu is facing criminal charges in three separate corruption cases.

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NEXT STEPS
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17. (U) The PMO gave each district work plans which disaggregate funding requests by PRDP priority sectors and indicate whether they are in addition to the current allocations. The Prime Minister established offices in Gulu and Kitgum, which will oversee PRDP implementation and provide technical assistance to district governments. The districts and ministries will provide the PMO with quarterly performance reports to determine whether the GOU is getting value for money. The GOU promised to release funds in a timely matter to the ministries and district accounting officers.

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COMMENT

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18. (SBU) The Prime Minister's blunt announcement of the PRDP delay surprised and disappointed outside observers, including ourselves. But the positive flip side is that the delay signals recognition by the GOU that without a fully coherent and accountable internal process, the PRDP will fail. The GOU was under immense political pressure from the international community and northern politicians to move the PRDP forward because it is highly sensitive to accusations that it lacks political will to support development in the north. And indeed, it appears that some northern politicians are using the delay merely to seek political gain rather than work with the GOU to ensure the effective implementation of the PRDP. For our part, U.S. Government programs in the north continue unimpeded and we will support the PRDP implementation process when it begins in earnest starting in July.

BROWNING